REPORT:
Community Dialogue and Public Forum on Urban Revitalization Through the Lenses of Peace and Justice

Community Forum Outcomes

On July 29, 2015, over 300 community members, leaders, and organizations participated in the “Community Dialogue and Public Forum on Urban Revitalization Through the Lenses of Peace and Justice” held at the Frederick Douglass Community Association. A World Café conversation was held to discuss challenges facing the Toledo community and possible solutions. The conversation focused around four main inquiry topics: social justice, economic justice, ecological justice, and peace. These inquiry topics were intentionally adopted from the “4 pillars framework” developed by Alicia Smith and the Junction Community Organization (a grassroots community revitalization group from the neighborhood in which the forum was held). Dr. Mark Chupp, international consultant and Assistant Professor at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences of Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, facilitated the session.

The following summary does not represent a complete transcription of every idea shared; rather it illuminates the most significant concerns, ideas and possibilities that surfaced from the discussions.

Photo 1: World Café Conversation
Social Justice

The first round of the World Café offered the question: *How might we build and revitalize our communities in ways that assure the dignity of everyone?*

Communication and collaboration with all stakeholders was cited as key for the design and implementation of community projects and initiatives. Stakeholder involvement is crucial in the development of a long-term community vision and allows the community to take ownership of the projects.

Community collaboration may come from structuring inclusive spaces for dialogue in which all perspectives are heard and respected. There should be specific outreach to include marginalized peoples. These should be held regularly. These spaces are important in building community cohesion and building strong networks of people, which help people to be accountable to their neighbors.

Other steps to revitalizing our communities include more youth involvement and better reintegration programs for former prisoners.

Economic Justice

The second round of the forum offered the question: *How might we revitalize our communities in a way that assures the economy is working for everyone?*

Lack of jobs in the area was a huge concern. When there are jobs available, the lack of transportation is a huge barrier to employment. Protections for workers were also discussed and there is a need for programs to educate both employers and employees on their rights. There is also a need to enact and enforce fair pay policies and protections against discriminatory firings. Diversity incentives were also discussed as a way for companies to hire more minority employees. “Ban the box” was suggested as a way to help former incarcerated people reintegrate into their communities and find work by reducing discrimination.

Educational programs were named as possible solutions to unemployment. This could mean support in local schools to teach professional and vocational skills. Support is needed for education about, and the forming of worker cooperatives. *Systems should be explored to support small local, sustainable, integrated communities and economies.* Alternative forms of economic exchange might also be explored.

Aside from jobs and transportation, there should be more of an emphasis placed on long-term solutions to economic challenges rather than short-term Band-Aid solutions. Economic development must engage all stakeholders in the design and development process, including the youth.

The City of Toledo was called on to stop all corruption of public officials. In addition, *trust needs to be built between police and community members, starting with a shift from police protecting property to police protecting people.*
Interest was also expressed in more community dialogue for discussing “economy” as a concept and to explore our own roles in perpetuating economic injustice. Other important issues need to be explored, such as private prisons and the school to prison pipeline.

**Ecological Justice**

In the third round of discussion, the question was raised: *How might we revitalize our communities in a way that protects natural resources and promotes healthy living?*

Many of the ideas voiced in this session revolved around issues of food. Better access to nutritional food is a huge priority. Many voiced concern that many areas of Toledo are food deserts without grocery stores. There should be increased access to nutritional school lunches for those in need. A possible solution offered was an increase in local food gardens and CSAs. Increased outreach and strengthening partnerships with those who own land could be one avenue to constructing more gardens.

There was also a general understanding that all things are connected and “community” must include nature. With this in mind, “green spaces” were discussed as important to building strong communities. More public parks were called for as safe, clean, community spaces. In order to reduce the use of chemicals and water, native plants and habitats were recommended. Local laws might better allow for such initiatives in parks and on private property.

There was also a call for safe and affordable housing aligned with sustainable practices. There is a need for more community education about lead paint and environmental contamination, particularly for urban gardens. Testing for lead paint and soil contamination should be made available.

Public transportation was named as important for moving people to jobs and shopping areas while reducing car usage. Responsible and sustainable business practices should be encouraged and incentivized. There should be investment in alternative energy.

Larger awareness of the importance of ecological justice is needed. Overall, regardless of specific programs taken, stakeholder inclusion and participation is key for their success and sustainability.

**Peace / Peace Education**

The final round of discussion asked: *How can we work together in making our communities less violent? How might we empower our neighbors to take action?*

It was noted that peace and the reduction of violence is intimately connected to the other three facets already discussed, social justice, economic justice, and ecological justice. *Peace is active and not simply the lack of violence.* To build strong communities, we need to
increase respect for ourselves and for each other. We need to be supported in expressing compassion. Part of this may include nurturing family relationships. This may also include rehabilitation and reintegration programs for former prisoners. Whatever programs are decided upon, they need to be done collaboratively in order to create sustainable programming.

To curb violence, one idea was to have more community gatherings to eat, live, and dance together. The issue of safe space was cited as a need for these gatherings. Further, lack of public transportation was raised as a barrier to such gatherings. Environment and the lack of healthy food were raised as contributing factors in behavior.

Religious organizations may need to take a more active leadership role in curbing violence. It was pointed out that there are many churches in the area and yet there is still violence in the streets.

The relationship between police and community members was also raised. The question was asked how to better build trust between these two groups.

Youth involvement was repeatedly called for. Ideas included engaging youth in schools for community service and community projects. Students should be challenged to think about these issues. The structures of racism should be taught. Compassion should be taught and our own actions should be analyzed.
Overarching Themes

Community Meetings & Stakeholder Inclusion

One of the most common threads that came out of the world café discussion was the need for increased community participation, communication, and collaboration. More community spaces might help build community and empathy while reducing violence, serve as educational spaces for discussing issues being faced, and might be utilized to participate and collaborate on the development and implementation of community projects.

Whatever programs are implemented, whether by community organizations or by the government, in order for them to be sustainable, the community needs involvement. This would allow community members to take ownership of both a long-term vision for the community and local projects.

Several ideas brought forth included creating inclusive spaces that might be structured for all perspectives to be heard. There should be specific outreach to include marginalized peoples. Having regular meeting times and spaces also builds strong communities where all can be heard and respected. This may be social space to eat, live, and dance, or it may be working space. Religious organizations might be tapped to take more active leadership roles in curbing violence as it was raised there are many churches in the area and yet there is still violence in the streets.

Transportation

Transportation was repeatedly raised as an issue throughout the community forum. Lack of public transportation was cited as barrier to employment and prevents people from accessing grocery stores and shopping areas. Increased public transportation service would also reduce dependency on cars.

Trust Building with Law Enforcement

The relationship between police and community members was also raised. The question was asked how to better build trust between these two groups. Community members voiced concern that police seem more interested in protecting property than protecting people.

Housing

There was also a call for safe and affordable housing aligned with sustainable practices. There is a need for more community education about lead paint and environmental contamination. In addition to housing, transportation to and from work was cited as
important. The need for protections against predatory lending and consumer education were also discussed.

**Youth Involvement & Education**

Youth involvement was also brought up multiple times during the conversations. Ideas included engaging youth in schools for community service and community projects. This may occur by partnering youth with mentors and offering more safe community programs outside of school.

**Food Security**

Many of the ideas voiced in the ecological justice section of the world café revolved around issues of food. Better access to nutritional food is a huge priority. Lack of public transportation is a part of this problem, however many voiced concern that many areas of Toledo are food deserts without grocery stores.

Partial solutions included increasing access to nutritional school lunches for those in need. There might be an increase in local food gardens and CSAs.
Outcomes Transcribed from Wall Lists

Social Justice

- Facilitating and fostering collaboration
- Mentors for young people
- Communication with various stakeholders:
  - Ownership of a long-term vision
  - Networking
  - Structuring spaces for dialogue
  - Space for all
  - Outreach to marginalized groups
  - Listening with humility
  - We can learn from everyone
  - Inclusivity for social equality
- Respecting diversity of perspectives
- Discrimination not acceptable
- Accountability to your fellow neighbor
- Prioritizing service to others
- Action Steps:
  - Reintegrating court-invalued persons
  - Get to know your neighbors
- Outreach to marginalized groups
- Creating safe spaces for collaboration
- Host a community dialogue & needs assessment

**Economic Justice**

- Access to public transportation system
- Removal of minorities is a problem in workforce
- Incentivizing minority hires
- Thinking about production in society as valuable
- Alternative forms of economic exchange
- Small local integrated communities that support one another
- Put pressure on the city to make something that lasts
- Less corruption of city officials
- Ban the box
- Programs to educate employers and employees on their rights
- Worker cooperatives
- Education of ourselves
  - Being open and honest about our role in perpetuating economic injustice
  - Educating about economic injustice
- Education systems to support local schools
  - Professional & Vocational education for youth
  - Education for future work and life skills
• Economic development must engage all stakeholders in the design and development process, including the youth.
• The police should shift from protecting property to protecting people
• Fair pay policies
• Lack of jobs
• Question the funding of the prison system

**Ecological Justice**

• Eat real food (no GMOs)
• Less lawn care, more native plants and local habitat
• Don’t give up public parks to corporations
• Awareness because we need the world
• Communicate with powers that be
• Address food deserts & grocery stores
• Affordable housing aligned with sustainable practices
• “Community” includes plants, animals, & Earth
• Individuals taking responsibility
• Local food gardens CSAs
• Require inclusion of stakeholders
• Education & make testing available for lead paint and soil contamination
• Available clean air, parks, and safe spaces
• Reach out to people with land for community gardens
• Nutritional school lunches grown in the community
• Public transportation to employment
• Responsible business practices
• Subsidize alternative energy

Peace Education

• Violence begets violence
• Meet the needs of our community
• Respect of each other
• Why do we have nine churches in the area but still have people fighting in the streets?
• How to we build trust between police and people?
• How do we support people who have given up, so they can contribute?
• Nurture family relationships
• Eliminate war
  • Harness ancient wisdom: gathering together, each cluster of the community, to eat, live, dance
• Prisons: user friendly, health care oriented
• Engage youth in positive projects for the future
• Spaces for the community to gather
• Help people expressing compassion to work with other
• Positive peace as ACTIVE
• Teach compassion
• Engage youth in schools and community service
• Move from less violence to non-violence
• Challenge kids to think
• Analyzing violence in our own actions
• Be aware that what you eat impacts behavior
• Collaborative support: establishing sustainable programming
• The three justices (social, economic, ecological) will bring peace
• Learning and teaching about structures of racism
• Action Step: make public transit advantageous for ALL